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President's Forum—Thoughts on Continuity and Change

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PRESIDENT'S FORUM



Thoughts on Continuity and Change

IN NATURE THERE ARE MANY COMPETING FORCES. Regarding leadership, I believe that the most powerful opposing forces that leaders must address revolve around the tendency for organizations (and individuals) to maintain the status quo and the contrasting need to adjust behavior to address changes occurring in the environment in which they operate. It is easy to take comfort from continuity of activity—"a state of stability and the absence of disruption." We know with certainty that the laws of physics and elegant mathematical formulas will remain constant and unalterable; human behavior, however, occupies the opposite end of the stability spectrum. The challenge for leaders at all levels is to maintain the continuity of actions that have proved successful in the past, while making modifications as necessary to accommodate the changes that inevitably occur.

The Naval War College currently is undertaking a measured program of operational and organizational changes that will keep the best aspects of what we have done successfully for over 130 years, while modifying activities as necessary to accommodate the ever-increasing level of change affecting the future world in which our students will live and work following their graduation. Previous President's Forums over the past five issues of this publication have spelled out the nature of many of these changes. This column seeks to put these changes into the context of past practice and lessons learned over more than a dozen decades.

Since the College's inception in 1884, its primary output has been alumni with an increased knowledge of the historical precedents of military actions and enhanced abilities to exercise critical-thinking skills in times of stress and conflict. These continuous threads remain fundamental to our efforts today, but our curricula now include sessions focusing on the changing geographical,

technological, and political landscapes that exist in the first quarter of the twenty-first century. Students now grapple with issues related to such factors as operations and potential conflict in the cyber world, adoption of offensive and defensive unmanned and robotic systems, and the use of space-based sensors and communications systems. *Cyber*, *robots*, and *space* are terms that our founder Stephen B. Luce would have found incomprehensible. Yet he would be entirely comfortable knowing that Naval War College students routinely dedicate precious learning time to understanding the full range of conditions in which they ultimately may fight and prevail. Other examples of ongoing actions include the following:

- As we teach our Joint Professional Military Education requirements, we have increased greatly our war-fighting focus while also increasing the maritime perspective. The requirement to teach sea control and the need for sea power never have been more important, and we have *navalized* our curriculum to achieve that end. In the training realm, we also have developed a number of war-fighting courses such as the Maritime Operational Planners Course, the Executive Level Operational Level of War Course, and the Maritime Staff Operators Course. We also are designing a new warfighter course for non-commanders that we hope to implement in the near future.
- Your Naval War College has been educating international officers since the first foreign students were enrolled in 1894. Regularly scheduled international educational programs have been an integral part of this institution since the inception of the Naval Command College in 1956, followed by the Naval Staff College in 1972. Over the years, thousands of students have earned a Naval War College diploma in recognition of their successful studies. Today we maintain this continuity of effort, but now we allow select international students to earn a fully accredited master's degree from the College. In this manner, they earn global recognition for their increased level of scholarship.
- It is widely recognized that any school is only as strong as its dedicated faculty enables it to be. In Newport, active-duty military officers and retired practitioners have been partnered in the classroom with highly qualified civilian educators for more than fifty years, ever since the appointment of Dr. Frederick Hartmann to the College's first long-term contract in 1966. These professional educators—many with advanced degrees from the nation's top academic institutions—bring extensive teaching and research experience to the diverse faculty. This year, to enable NWC better to recruit and retain faculty of the high caliber desired, we are taking steps to modify the College's policies and practices to resemble more closely the conditions educators find in more-traditional (i.e., Ivy League) graduate institutions. Faculty

committees are working to recommend changes to compensation levels, to improve and standardize promotion processes, and to create a form of future employment stability similar to tenure. Our goal is to ensure that upwardly mobile educators are not deterred from accepting employment at the Naval War College out of concern for the degree to which government employment rules differ from those at other top-tier graduate institutions.

In considering the issues of continuity and change, I am fond of the words of former Harvard University Fellow Pauline R. Kezer, who has written: "Continuity gives us roots; change gives us branches, letting us stretch and grow and reach new heights."

The examples above are only a few of the areas in which we are instituting carefully considered changes to the status quo so as to serve our students better, and ultimately our military services and the nation. I seek the assistance of all Naval War College supporters and both past and present members of the extended Naval War College family in contributing ideas for change through participation on faculty committees, working within each organizational unit, and even by forwarding constructive e-mails. Finally, I ask the entire College community to recognize the benefits of the small but significant changes being made as we work together to "stretch and grow and reach new heights."

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